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SUBJECT: AL-SOSWA READY TO LEAD THE WAY IN HUMAN RIGHTS

1. Summary: On 9/06 Human Rights Minister, Amat al-Aleem Al-Soswa, told Ambassador that dealing with other, more established ministries can be challenging and that Yemen still has a ways to go to improve its human rights situation. Soswa touched on her efforts to protect freedom of the press, the rights of detainees suspected of terrorism, and the willingness of the ROYG to accept USG help in training security forces on human rights. End Summary.

Al-Soswa: Ready to take on her Role

2. "We have a long way to go," acknowledged Yemen's first Minister of Human Rights, Amat al-Aleem Al-Soswa, in her first meeting with Ambassador. Soswa said that she has just begun to address human rights issues in Yemen and that she has "no intention of quitting no matter how difficult the endeavor." She continued that her year-old ministry is learning to positively affect the human rights situation. Soswa commented that the Ministry's dual role as both an advocate for the people and the government, makes her job difficult at times.

----- Human Rights Challenges: The Press, Detainees, and Equality -----

3. Al-Soswa raised the one-year prison sentence against the editor-in-chief of the opposition newspaper Al-Shura (covered septel), saying that recent government pressure to muzzle the press was "not justified." Soswa revealed she had contacted the paper and offered to attend any subsequent court hearings if they so requested.

4. Ambassador commended the Minister's recent speech in which she called for equality in political participation and representation for all citizens. Soswa suggested that a quota for women's seats in parliament might be a solution to redress under-representation, but forecast that getting Parliament to agree and to amend the Constitution would not be easy.

5. On the issue of detainees suspected of ties to terrorism being held by ROYG authorities without due process, Soswa accepted that "exceptional" measures were required. She reported that the cases of many of these detainees are in the process of being settled, but did not offer a figure for how many remained in custody. Ambassador assured her that the Guantanamo Bay process was also moving forward and that a second Yemeni delegation would soon be permitted to visit with Yemeni detainees. Soswa urged that the USG remember it is considered a leading nation in respect for human rights and that it not minimize its role as an example for other nations.

Invitation to AS Craner

6. Al-Soswa extended an invitation to Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner to visit Yemen, and also expressed an interest in possible USG human rights training for all levels of the security forces.

Comment

7. Comment: The Ministry of Human Rights, significant progress in the short time since its creation is a direct reflection of Soswa's fortitude. Several Yemeni human rights activists praise Soswa for her ability to influence established institutions in Yemen. Many local observers attribute her effectiveness not so much to the strength of the Ministry, but rather to other Ministers taking her criticisms personally and seeking to avoid them. End Comment.

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